Iowa Department of Education

Concept Paper

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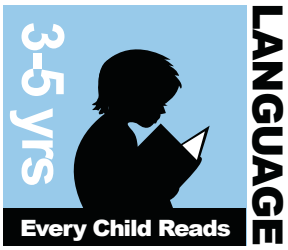

Preschoolers

(ages 3 to 5 years)

THE COMMUNICATION SKILL used to tell a child you love them or to place an order for a frosty mug of root beer on a hot summer day is called language. Many different types of language – from sign language to languages spoken in other countries – communicate ideas and thoughts. Regardless of the type of language used, the purpose of language is to convey a meaningful message to the listener. Language skills are one of the most important life-long skills children learn. Language skills allow children and adults to express their wants and needs, feelings, and desires. Language skills help to increase knowledge by asking questions and seeking answers for further information or clarification. Language skills shape organization of thoughts in sharing personal experiences or stories, giving directions, teaching, or making a point in a conversation. Most importantly, language skills provide the beginning foundation for later reading and writing success.

Language conveys meaningful messages

What exactly are language skills? Language skills refer to a child using words to convey a meaningful message to the listener. Language is a systematic sequence of sounds, known as phonology. An example is saying the sounds 'b - i - g' for the word 'big.' It means understanding and using meaningful words in your vocabulary, known as semantics. Language means using words in the correct order, known as syntax. For example in the sentence, "The is big house" does not make sense in English. Last, 'language skills' means using language in the appropriate social context, known as pragmatics. Parents and teachers probably would not appreciate hearing, "No duh!" from a child. Language skills do not mean speaking every word with perfect grammar or diagramming sentences as you may have learned in English classes. Language skills of a child means saying words and sentences that sound close to the expression of adults.

Before children learn to convey a meaningful message or talk like adults, they go through many developmental stages, beginning at birth. Children first learn to babble, then repeat words, then say single words and phrases, and finally, talk in sentences (McCormick & Schiefelbusch, 1984). These phases of language development become a framework that stays with adults throughout life. The better developed the language framework, the better the chances that the child will be successful in reading and writing. Language becomes the basis for developing writing and reading skills because there is much redundancy to our language. A child with a good language framework will identify this redundancy and anticipate the next words used in either reading or writing (Schickedanz, 1999).

Adults help children develop language

If children need to develop a good foundation of language skills, how do adults enhance this development? Although it may appear that children develop language skills quite effortlessly, language development involves more than letting children develop on their own or surrounding them with a lot of talking adults. The ease with which children gain language skills depends on the activities and experiences in their everyday lives, the number of opportunities they have to talk about their ideas, and the rate at which they gain and use new vocabulary or words. Children are greatly affected by the actions and communications of adults and other children during daily experiences. Adults contribute to the development of language skills by being responsive to children, planning age-appropriate language activities, and providing opportunities for children to interact with each other. Adults can facilitate development of the child's basic language skills by providing a foundation that will carry them through life.

Principles to foster language development

Three major principles have been selected to assist parents and teachers in guiding and facilitating development of the child's language framework:

1) Children need to have many interactive experiences to develop background knowledge and language skills;
2) Children need frequent opportunities to talk about their experiences and ideas using words, phrases, and sentences; and
3) Children need to learn and use new vocabulary or words continuously.

Principle 1

Interactive Experiences for Background Knowledge and Language Skills

WHEN CHILDREN PET A FUZZY KITTEN or listen to a band in a parade, they are engaged in experiences that develop background knowledge. Background knowledge is the information, experiences, and feelings children have acquired from their own real-life interactions of seeing, feeling, and doing things to gain knowledge about the world (Schickedanz, 1999). Children actively involved in meaningful experiences expand their knowledge and interests, and their language flourishes (Morrow, 1990). Adults may use a variety of common everyday experiences and simple materials to promote the development of a child's language skill. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997), adults need to engage individual children and groups of children in real experiences, projects, and current events. In addition, children who have gone on trips, walked in parks, and visited zoos will have more background knowledge and language to take into reading and writing experiences. A good repertoire of background knowledge is essential if children are to be good readers (Pearson & Fielding, 1991). However, parents and teachers don't have to plan exotic trips to the jungles of Africa for language experiences to occur.

There are two ways parents and teachers can structure language experiences depending on the child's age and interests. First, parents and teachers may develop or use experiences that occur as daily routines in the home or early childhood setting. Second, parents and teachers may develop or use planned experiences that occur both in and outside of the home or early childhood setting.

Structuring experiences to build language skills

Daily Routines in the Home or Early Childhood Setting. Many experiences occur naturally throughout the child's daily routine or events that take place in the home or early childhood setting to enhance language development. The following chart shows a few examples both parents and teachers may use to provide interactive language experiences for the child.

Daily Routines In the Home	Daily Routines In the Early Childhood Setting
Food Daily Routines • Eating breakfast, lunch, or supper • Making cookies, sandwiches, or juice • Feeding the pets • Setting the table • Doing dishes	**Food Daily Routines** • Eating breakfast, lunch, or snack • Preparing snacks • Serving snacks • Taking care of the dirty plates, silverware, and glasses after eating lunch
Clothing Daily Routines • Putting clothes on in the morning or pajamas on at night • Folding clean clothes	**Clothing Daily Routines** • Putting hats and coats on to play outside • Playing dress-up • Putting on a paint shirt for painting
Daily Events or Activities • Getting mail from the mailbox • Taking a bath • Brushing teeth • Watching a television show • Reading books • Playing with toys, materials, and objects • Picking up toys and materials • Engaging in computer games	**Daily Events or Activities** • Washing hands • Signing in for the day • Lining up after outside play • Drawing a picture • Reading books • Playing with toys, materials, and objects • Picking up toys and materials • Engaging in computer games

The important point to remember in selecting activities for language experiences at home or in early childhood settings is to use everyday events or routines involving the child or children. Any simple daily routine can provide a wealth of opportunities to set up a language-rich experience.

Planned Experiences Structured Inside or Outside of the Home or Early Childhood Setting. Many language experiences occur naturally through adult-initiated events that take place both inside or outside of the home or early childhood setting. Parents must do many things outside of the home to keep the household going. An early childhood setting may also have the opportunity to provide other experiences for children. The following chart shows a few examples that parents and teachers could use to provide planned language experiences inside or outside of the home or early childhood setting.

Planned Experiences Inside and Outside of Home	Planned Experiences Inside or Outside the Early Childhood Care and Education Setting
Food Experiences • Baking favorite family cookies for a special occasion • Bringing a parent breakfast-in-bed for a birthday • Going on a picnic • Eating Thanksgiving dinner at Grandma's • Eating at a restaurant (McDonald's)	**Food Experiences** • Sharing purchased foods to make Stone Soup • Inviting grandparents for tea • Going on a picnic • Eating at McDonald's on a field trip • Setting up a bakery for dramatic play
Regularly Planned Experiences • Caring for a garden • Washing windows • Shopping at the grocery store • Shopping at Wal-Mart • Going to the library	**Regularly Planned Experiences** • Walking to the park • Going to the library • Reading with visiting Big Buddies • Having a fire drill
Special Events or Activities • Going to the zoo or a farm • Going to a movie • Watching a fireworks display on the Fourth of July • Going swimming • Taking a trip to the mountains	**Special Events or Activities** • Inviting a guest speaker to share something • Visiting a fire station • Going rollerskating • Watching a school play or program put on by elementary or high school students • Going to the Post Office

The important point to remember in doing planned activities is to provide simple experiences with focused events involving the child or children. Many other language-rich activities and events can be found in daily newspapers or listening to radio announcements.

Principle 2

Opportunities to Talk Using Words, Phrases, and Sentences

ONCE THE PARENT OR TEACHER SELECTS AN EXPERIENCE or plans something to do with the child to build language skills (first principle), the adult focuses on the child's understanding and expansion of meaning from the wide variety of activities and experiences. In the second principle, the parent and teacher focus on allowing the child opportunities to talk about their experiences and ideas in words, phrases, and sentences, depending on the age of the child. The more time adults spend talking with children during daily activities, the more rapidly children's language develops (Hart & Risley, 1999).

Children develop language skills using words, phrases, and sentences at different rates. Children's social and cultural background will make a difference in the rate and ways they learn to use language (Hart & Risley, 1999). By age five, most children have developed language skills that are fairly close to adult language (Morrow, 1990). This does not mean children stop learning language skills past the age of five, but it does indicate the basic foundation for using language is set. Adults first help children expand from saying single words to phrases, to sentences, and finally to conversation by talking with the child and, second, by providing guidance before, during, and after a language experience or activity. Two strategies can help children develop a basic foundation of language skills: 1) talk with the child, and 2) provide guidance before, during, and after an experience or activity. See Appendix A: Understanding Children: Language Development.

Talk with the child

Children who just held a new puppy or tried a new food will find the experience enriched if an adult asks them about their experience. This talk helps to expand children's understanding of language and builds background knowledge. It is this background knowledge children need to make meaning from the stories that adults read to them and, later, stories they read to themselves. To talk with a child, adults must remember to engage the child in conversation, use sentences to match the child's understanding, and provide the child time to talk.

Engage children in talk or conversation. Adults assist children in talking as they engage children in a conversation. Adults can build on a selected theme, such as an interest of the child, or a daily routine by making a statement or asking a question. An example of the adult making a statement followed by a question to include the child would be: "I'm thinking about building a fire station with my blocks. What else was in the fire station book we read this morning?" The child may answer, "A fire truck." The adult would then respond, "Let's build a big long

fire truck for the fire station." In this example, the adult has actively engaged the child in play, associated a previous reading activity from the morning routine, and provided an idea for the child to form an opinion or an answer. The child can agree, make another suggestion, or ask a question. The adult facilitation and guidance of the play activity increases the level of the child's play and emerging literacy skills (Christie and Enz, 1992).

The role of the adult may vary from minimal prompts to specific adult directions as guided by environmental arrangements or facilitated by direct teaching in order to increase language interactions between other children or adults. The adult may facilitate conversations by encouraging children to describe their projects or ideas and respond to other children's comments (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). For example, as children talk with their friends, the adult may offer cues and suggestions about information the child leaves out. If a child tells some friends about a fun trip s/he will take but does not provide much information, the adult could expand the conversation by asking or commenting:

"You're going to a lake?"
"I like to go to the lake where my grandma and grandpa live."
"When I go on a trip, I like to go to the lake."
"Tell us what you like to do when you are at the lake?"
"Who is going with you?"
"Tell your friends what you will see at the lake."
"How will you get there?"

You may also provide choices to help a child use more words and sentences. For example: "Will you go swimming or fishing when you get to the lake?" "Do your parents and brothers go with you to the lake?" "Do you cook on a camp stove or campfire at the lake?" The adult supports the developmental capabilities of individual children and takes an active role in promoting children's learning by utilizing a range of techniques such as modeling phrases to say, posing problems, asking challenging questions, and providing communication devices as needed for children to communicate their interests, requests, and feelings (Division for Early Childhood Council For Exceptional Children, 1993).

Use sentences to match the child's understanding. Adults assist children in talking by changing the number of words used in their sentences to match the child's level of understanding. If a three-year-old uses a two- to three-word sentence (example: "Mom, a truck."), the adult needs to answer by expanding the child's words. However, the adult needs to use a reasonable amount of words to model language for the child. Therefore, the adult would use a three- to five-word sentence, not a ten- to 12-word sentence to respond to the child. For example, in response to the child's sentence "Mom, a truck," the adult might say, "It was a big truck." The adult probably would not say, "It was a two-ton truck with 18 wheels hauling a load of gravel from the rock quarry." This sentence has too much information and too many words for a three-year-old child to understand. As the

child gets older and language and experiences mature, the adult adds more words to sentences to increase the level of language modeled and expand background knowledge for the child.

Provide children with time to talk. Adults must provide children time to talk if children are to practice putting words and sentences together. Children often need more time to process information and gather their thoughts before responding. The average length of time the adult should wait for a child's response is at least three to five seconds (Tobin, 1987). Whether the adult makes a comment or asks a question, it is important to count silently to five, giving the child ample time to respond. Do not rush children in their talk with you. Allow children time to think and time to talk.

Provide guidance before, during, and after an experience or activity

One of the easiest ways to provide guidance for the child learning and using language from an experience or event is to talk about it before doing the activity, talk about it during or while the activity occurs, and talk about it after completing the activity (Strong & North, 1996). Talking with children before a routine, event, or activity is very important. Talking at this stage stimulates children's thinking and prepares them for the routine, event, or activity. Talking during the activity expands children's vocabulary and organizes their background knowledge. Talking after an activity ends allows the adult to help children gain understanding of the activity by discussion. The adult can reinforce vocabulary and help children sequence everyday or special-experience events. There are many different ways parents and teachers can do the before, during, and after activities with children. Language experiences are designed to be interactive between child and adult, rather than being directed by the adult. The following three strategies may be used when talking with children before, during, or after any activity:

- **C**ommenting
- **A**sking questions
- **R**esponding by expanding and adding new information to children's comments or questions

These strategies are easy to remember using the acronym C A R: C for commenting, A for asking, and R for responding (Notari-Syverson, Maddox, Lim & Cole, 1998). The important point is to select a few strategies and try them out. Further definition of these three strategies follows.

Commenting

BEFORE comment. Parents and teachers should make comments about language experiences for the child. Adults are like a narrator talking aloud, sharing their knowledge and expanding the child's language framework. So, *before* the routine, event, or activity, the adult needs to talk aloud about materials the child(ren) will use, see, touch, etc. For example, before a daily routine such as getting dressed, the adult might make the comment:

Home Suggestions	Early Childhood Setting Suggestions
"Tammy, it's time to get dressed. We are going to the park so we must dress warmly. Here are your socks and shoes, your red sweater, and your blue pants."	"We are going for a walk in the snow. It is cold outside. You will need to put on your hats, coats, and boots. Please stand beside a teacher and ask for help to zip your coat."

DURING comment. Adults need to talk aloud making comments to the child(ren) in the same way *during* the actual routine. For example, during the routine of getting dressed the adult might make the statement:

Home Suggestions	Early Childhood Setting Suggestions
"Tammy, you are such a big girl. You are dressing yourself. You are pulling your sweater over your head. Peek-a-boo!"	"I see John is putting on his boots. His feet will not get cold outside. Linda's zipper is stuck. She needs help!"

AFTER comment. Comments the adult makes *after* the activity is finished are also important. For example, after the routine of getting dressed is completed, the adult might say:

Home Suggestions	Early Childhood Setting Suggestions
"You're all dressed. First, you put on your red sweater, then your blue pants. Last of all, you put on your shoes and socks. Wow! You look nice and warm! You are ready for the park!"	"We are all dressed for our walk in the snow! Everyone has on coats. I see boots on all feet and 10 hats on 10 heads. Hold your hands up in the air so I can look for gloves. Yes, we are ready to go for a snowy walk. Let's go!"

By making comments before, during, and after the activity, the adult is expanding language understanding and increasing background knowledge for the child.

Asking questions

Asking questions is another strategy used in talking with children *before, during,* and *after* activities. Questions take three forms: yes/no questions, 'wh--' questions, and open-ended questions.

Yes/No Questions. Yes/no questions usually begin with words such as is/are, do/does, or can/will/would/should. Yes/no questions are the easiest to answer. However, thought processing and language are both limited in a yes/no question, and adults really don't gather much information from the child who just answers yes or no. It is important for adults to ask yes/no questions with real choices of answers. For example, asking a child, "Do you think it is time for you to get dressed?" or "Are you ready to eat breakfast now?" may result in a "no" response. The adult is not really giving a choice to the child and may end up with an argument. Adults should limit the number of yes/no questions they ask children since there is only a one-word response. The following examples demonstrate using *before, during,* and *after* yes/no questions from the getting-dressed and snowy-walk language experiences.

Home Suggestions	Early Childhood Setting Suggestions
BEFORE yes/no questions "Mommy is dressed. Do you have your shoes on?"	**BEFORE yes/no questions** "We are going on a snowy walk. Did you bring your boots?"
DURING yes/no questions "Are your pants too tight?"	**DURING yes/no questions** "It is cold outside walking in the snow. Is your coat warm?"
AFTER yes/no questions "Your clothes are all on! Do you want to take a sweater today?"	**AFTER yes/no questions** "Did your feet get cold walking in the snow?"

'Wh--' Questions. The 'wh--' question gives the adult more information and often an idea about the understanding level of a child. If the adult asks, "Where did you put your socks?", and the child answers, "My Mommy buyed them for me!", the adult knows the child did not understand the "where" part of the question. Parents and teachers may ask questions that begin with the words *who, what, where,* or *when.* The following chart provides suggestions of using 'wh' questions before, during, or after the getting-dressed language activity.

Home Suggestions	Early Childhood Setting Suggestions
BEFORE 'wh--' questions "Who put your clean clothes out for you?" "What are you going to wear this morning?" "You need to get dressed. Where are your clothes?"	**BEFORE 'wh--' questions** "We are going on a snowy walk. What should we wear to stay warm?"
DURING 'wh--' questions "When should we put on your shoes?" "What do you want to put on first?"	**DURING 'wh--' questions** "It is cold outside walking in the snow. When do you think the snow will melt?"
AFTER 'wh--' questions "Where should we put your dirty socks and blue pants?"	**AFTER 'wh--' questions** "Who stayed warm walking in the snow? What helped you stay warm?"

Open-ended Questions. Some questions adults ask children need to be open-ended. Open-ended questions are questions that can be answered in more than one way. These questions usually begin with "Why," "How," or "What will happen if…." Usually, there is a correct versus a right-or-wrong answer to these questions. Open-ended questions are very important because children's answers allow adults to see how children are processing questions from experiences and information.

Home Suggestions	Early Childhood Setting Suggestions
BEFORE open-ended questions "How did these clothes get clean for you?" *Answers might include:* "With soap and water." "In the washing machine." "You washed them."	**BEFORE open-ended questions** "How will we stay warm walking outside?" *Answers might include:* "We must wear our coats and hats." "We could walk fast!" "We could take a short walk!"
DURING open-ended questions "Why do you suppose we are getting dressed?" *Answers might include:* "Because I want to play outside." "Because that's what we do every morning."	**DURING open-ended questions** "Why are we wearing warm clothes outside?" *Answers might include:* "Because we don't want to get cold." "Because my mom said I always have to wear my coat and hat playing outside."
AFTER open-ended questions "What will happen if you put your shoes on before your socks?" *Answers might include:* "I couldn't get my shoes on." "It would feel funny."	**AFTER open-ended questions** "What would happen if we bring the snow inside? *Answers might include:* "It would melt!" "The floor would get wet."

The easiest questions for children to answer are "who" and "what" questions. The most difficult questions for children are the "why," "how," and "what will happen if…" questions. (See Appendix B, Age Range for Questions.) As a child matures, s/he is able to answer more difficult questions. Adults must provide children with many opportunities to answer those more thought-provoking questions. Listen very closely to children's answers for all questions. Adults can often learn much about feelings, fears, hopes, likes, and dislikes of children in their answers to questions before, during, and after a routine or activity occurs.

Responding by Expanding and Adding New Information to Children's Questions or Comments. Children expand language understanding and increase background knowledge through adult responses to their questions or comments. Adults must respond to children's questions and comments before, during, and after activities in much the same manner by making statements as discussed previously. Adults need to expand on children's comments or answers to questions to help children increase language understanding. Adults can also expand on children's comments or answers to questions by suggesting other possible answers. Examples of responding and adding new information to a child's questions before, during, or after an activity could include the following suggestions:

Home Suggestions	Early Childhood Setting Suggestions
BEFORE Child: "Why do I have to put on my clothes?" Adult: "So you will be nice and warm."	**BEFORE** Child: "Why are we going on a snowy walk?" Adult: "So we can exercise our walking legs."
DURING Child: "I'm wearing my blue pants." Adult: "Yes, your blue pants will keep your legs nice and warm."	**DURING** Adult points to a squirrel and asks, "Why is the squirrel digging in the snow?" Child answers, "Because he's looking for a nut." *Adult expands the child's comment by saying,* "Yes, he's hungry so he is looking for a nut." *You have agreed with the child and expanded language by providing a new word and a reason for the squirrel to be digging in the snow (hungry).*
AFTER Child: "I combed my hair." Adult: "You can wear barrettes in your hair today to match your sweater."	**AFTER** Adult: "Why did the squirrel dig in the snow?" Child: "Because he was looking for a nut." *Adult might then say,* "Good idea. I wonder how he eats those hard cold nuts?"

Children learn when adults respond to their questions or comments. When adults respond to children at the moment they make comments or ask questions (BEFORE, DURING, or AFTER an activity), a teachable moment has been captured. This is a wonderful time for teaching and learning to occur.
See Appendix C, Specific Suggestions for a Trip to the Zoo.

Principle 3

Learn and Use New Vocabulary Continuously

EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES AND EXPERIENCES provide opportunities for children to build background knowledge and use words, phrases, and sentences to talk about them. Children also need *to learn and use new vocabulary or words continuously.* The greatest vocabulary development occurs from birth to age three and continues through the early elementary years.

A child with a large listening and speaking vocabulary has an enormous advantage in learning to read (Burns, Griffon & Snow, 1999). Understanding reading depends mostly on a child's ability to understand the meaning of individual words in the story. It is more difficult for a child to read words s/he does not know how to say or has never heard before. Adults need to give children a large vocabulary so they will develop reading and writing skills more easily.

Adults can assist the child in gaining and using new vocabulary *indirectly* or *directly.* Both *indirect* and *direct* methods can be used in routine activities (snack time, story time, clean up, and play), as well as in planned activities (field trips). The difference between the two methods is that *indirect teaching* assists vocabulary growth informally while *direct teaching* assists vocabulary growth purposefully.

How do you enhance a child's opportunities to learn and use new vocabulary?

Indirect Teaching. Parents and teachers enhance vocabulary development everyday, informally or indirectly, by talking and allowing children to talk. Talk! Talk! Talk! Talking with other children and adults is children's best source of exposure to new vocabulary words and ideas. As suggested previously, just letting children talk to each other is not enough. It is important that adults get involved in children's conversations to build on and expand their language. Listen to the children and let them guide you in talking about those things that interest them. It is during these informal opportunities that you can bring new vocabulary words into the conversation. Think about talking to children while fixing snacks, setting the table for snacks or lunch, or as you are putting the toys away. For example: "Today, I'm going to pick up all the blocks. What toys will you pick up, Joey?" Another example might be: "I picked up all the blocks. There are still toys to put away. I'm going to put away the cars. Lisa, will you pick up the red and yellow cars?"

Everyday activities (those that are done unconsciously or routinely) provide many opportunities to use *indirect* teaching of new vocabulary by:

- Talking about feelings ("You are really excited about your new truck!")
- Describing something happening ("The truck is going *fast.*")
- Naming things ("That's called the *windshield.*")
- Explaining ("The truck won't go because the *wheel is broken.*")
- Pretending ("Let's pretend we're going to Grandma's in your *truck.*")
- Talking about the future ("Tomorrow we'll go for a ride in Grandpa's *truck!*")

Daily routines and planned activities are great times to talk with children and to let them share ideas, experiences, and current projects with each other. This provides an opportunity for children to listen to each other describe an event and have the opportunity to ask questions, clarify ideas, and respond with their ideas. Children must become aware of unknown words before they begin to understand and use them. As parents and teachers talk to children, they should name unfamiliar objects and point out new words in conversation, in play, or in stories. For example: "Look, the rain is almost stopping, and the sun is starting to come out. I see a rainbow. Rainbow. Do you know that word? (Point to the rainbow in the sky.) We see a rainbow when it stops raining and the sun is coming out." The adult helps children become aware of new words they will use at a later time.

Indirect teaching of new vocabulary words occurs informally as children hear and say new words repeatedly. It is important to understand that children learn and gain experience using new words through everyday conversations, during daily routines, planned activities, and social interactions.

Direct Teaching. Direct teaching of new vocabulary words may also be used in daily routine activities (snack time, story time, clean up, or play), as well as during planned activities (field trips). In indirect teaching, the parent or teacher allows children to hear new words informally and gain their use at the child's own rate. However, with *direct teaching,* the parent or teacher makes a concentrated effort to *teach* new vocabulary words relating to an activity. For example, a field trip might be planned and new materials set out (zoo animals, small cages, zoo puzzles, pictures of zoo workers, etc.). A special guest with special equipment might visit (a police officer with flashlight, badge, and cap). An unfamiliar story might be read (*A Pocket For Corduroy*).

To help children to learn specific words relating to a situation or activity, *direct teaching* of new vocabulary words must be used. Talk to children and explain the new word(s), say the new word(s) as frequently as you can. Let the children say the word(s). Demonstrate the new word(s) as often as you can with real objects that children can touch, hold, and explore. Remind children throughout the day of the new word(s).

Other opportunities to teach vocabulary words directly include the following:

1. **Explain new words and use another word that means the same as the new word.**
   "The police officer will wear a special badge that lets us all know he is a police officer. The badge is gold and shiny. Another word for 'badge' is 'button.' The police officer will wear a shiny gold button or badge."

2. **Read words in stories as they sound.**
   In *The Very Hungry Caterpillar,* read the word *pop* with a 'popping' sound. In *...Corduroy,* read the word *crash* with loud 'crashing' sound.

3. **Use sentence completion activities.**
   "It was a story about a bunny who did not want to go to _____."
   (Let children complete the sentence.)

4. **Give clues if children cannot remember a new vocabulary word.**
   "One of the animals was something that says 'meow.' It is a baby cat, and it rhymes with mitten. It was a _____ (kitten)."

Storybooks introduce children to new vocabulary, words, concepts, and ideas and are a wonderful source for *direct teaching* of vocabulary. However, reading to children and using books for vocabulary enrichment will be reviewed in depth in the Reading Module. *Direct teaching* and *indirect teaching* are both important in helping children develop vocabulary that will provide a strong foundation for language understanding and expression, reading, and writing. For further suggestions, refer to Appendix D: Suggestions to Enhance Language Development.

Personal storytelling

To help children gain meaning from activities and experiences, develop verbal expression skills, and learn and use new vocabulary words, adults must talk and read often to young children. Remember, children need to have many interactive experiences to build language skills; they need frequent opportunities to talk about their experiences and ideas using words, phrases, and sentences; and children need to learn and use new vocabulary or words continuously.

One way to continually provide language skill development and assess whether or not children are gaining language skills is to give them opportunities to tell their own personal stories. Children use their language skills and background knowledge to talk about things important to them in their lives. Through these personal stories, we are able to determine if children are developing their vocabulary, able to recall information, and sequence that information from beginning to end.

Two strategies will assist children with developing storytelling skills. The *first strategy* is to *model storytelling.* Just as adults can remember and tell stories from their childhood passed down through family and friends, children are learning to be storytellers by listening to stories they too will pass on.

The following are guidelines for *modeling storytelling:*

- Keep the story short;
- Make the story interesting and familiar to children;
- Include characters, plot, and setting; and
- End with a question or some way to encourage children to tell their own stories related to the topic.

The *second strategy* to use in assisting children with developing storytelling skills is to *expand on children's stories.* When children are stuck, there are ways to assist them to continue their story. This can be done by asking questions, making comments, repeating what they have said, and using phrases such as "tell me more" and "what happened next?"

The more children practice telling stories, the more their language skills improve. By listening to their stories, adults can assess children's language skills, background knowledge, and vocabulary.

Everyone can make a difference in a child's language development for later reading and writing skills. It is never too late to begin talking with your child.

Appendix A

Emerging Literacy

Understanding Children: Language Development

Ames, IA: Iowa State University, University Extension.

What could be more exciting than hearing your baby's first word? As that first word grows into a sentence and later into conversation, you will be watching a miracle—the miracle of language development. As a parent, you are your child's first teacher. When you take time to listen, talk, read, sing, and play games with your child, you help teach important language skills that last a lifetime.

Age
0 to 6 months

Typical language skills
- Cries in different ways to say, "I'm hurt, wet, hungry, or lonely."
- Makes noises to voice displeasure or satisfaction.
- Babbles.
- Recognizes and looks for familiar voices and sounds.

Nurture your child's language skills
- When babies babble, gurgle, and coo, respond with the same sounds.
- Talk with infants when you feed, dress, or play with them.
- Sing songs.
- Play soft music.

Age
6 to 12 months

Typical language skills
- Waves bye-bye.
- Responds to name.
- Understands names of some familiar objects.
- Shows interest in picture books.
- Pays attention to conversation.
- Says first word (maybe).
- Babbles expressively as if talking.
- Says "Da-da" and "Ma-ma" (maybe).

Nurture your child's language skills
- Teach babies their names and names of familiar objects.
- Talk to them about what you are doing: "Now I am getting Sara's socks."
- Play peek-a-boo.
- Hold babies in your lap and show them pictures in magazines and books.
- Sing simple songs.

Age
12 to 18 months

Typical language skills
- Identifies family members and familiar objects.
- Points to a few body parts such as nose, ears.
- Follows simple, one-step instructions.

- Says two or more words.
- Imitates familiar noises like cars, planes, birds.
- Repeats a few words.
- Looks at person talking.
- Says “Hi” or “Bye” if reminded.
- Uses expressions like “Oh-oh.”
- Asks for something by pointing or using one word.
- Identifies an object in a picture book.

Nurture your child’s language skills

- Teach your child names of people, body parts, and objects.
- Teach sounds that different things make.
- Read simple stories.
- Make a scrapbook with bright pictures of familiar objects such as people, flowers, houses, and animals to “read.”
- Speak clearly and simply; “baby talk” confuses children who are learning to talk.

Age
18 months to 2 years

Typical language skills

- Says about 50 words but can understand many more.
- Echoes single words that are spoken by someone else.
- Talks to self and jabbers expressively.
- Says names of toys and familiar objects.
- Uses two- to three-word sentences like, “Daddy bye-bye;” “All gone.”
- Hums or tries to sing simple songs.
- Listens to short rhymes or fingerplays.
- Points to eyes, ears, or nose when asked.
- Uses the words “Bye,” “Hi,” “Please,” and “Thank you” if prompted.

Nurture your child’s language skills

- Read at least one book to your child every day.
- Encourage your child to repeat short sentences.
- Give simple instructions. (“Give the book to Jon.”)
- Read rhymes with interesting sounds, especially those accompanied by actions or pictures.

Age
2 to 3 years

Typical language skills

- Identifies up to 10 pictures in a book when objects are named.
- Uses simple phrases and sentences.
- Responds when called by name.
- Responds to simple directions.
- Starts to say plural and past tense words.
- Enjoys simple stories, rhymes, and songs.
- Uses two- to three-word sentences.
- Enjoys looking at books.
- Points to eyes, ears, or nose when asked.

- Repeats words spoken by someone else.
- Vocabulary expands up to 500 words.

Nurture your child's language skills
- Play word games like "This Little Piggy" or "High as a House."
- Listen, talk, and read with your child every day.
- Teach your child simple songs and nursery rhymes.

Age
3 to 4 years

Typical language skills
- Talks so 75 to 80 percent of speech is understandable.
- Says own first and last name.
- Understands location words like over, under, on, and in.
- Understands now, soon, and later.
- Asks who, what, where, and why questions.
- Talks in complete sentences of 3 to 5 words: "Mommy is drinking juice." "There's a big dog."
- Stumbles over words sometimes — usually not a sign of stuttering.
- Enjoys repeating words and sounds over and over.
- Listens attentively to short stories and books.
- Likes familiar stories told without any changes in words.
- Enjoys listening to stories and repeating simple rhymes.
- Enjoys telling simple stories from pictures or books.
- Likes to sing and can carry a simple tune.
- Recognizes common everyday sounds.
- Identifies common colors such as red, blue, yellow, green.

Nurture your child's language skills
- Include your child in everyday conversation. Talk about what you are going to do, ask questions, listen.
- Play simple games that teach concepts like over, under, on, and in.
- Read books with poems, songs, and rhymes.
- Encourage your children to repeat favorite stories.
- Give children a few books of their own and [demonstrate] how to take good care of them.

Age
4 to 5 years

Typical language skills
- Recognizes some letters if taught and may be able to print own name.
- Recognizes familiar words in simple books or signs (STOP sign, fast-food signs).
- Speaks in fairly complex sentences — "The baby ate the cookie before I could put it on the table."
- Enjoys singing simple songs, rhymes, and nonsense words.
- Adapts language to listener's level of understanding. To baby sister: "Daddy go bye-bye." To mother: "Daddy went to the store."
- Learns name, address, and phone number if taught.
- Asks and answers who, what, why, where, and what if questions.

- Names six to eight colors and three shapes.
- Follows two unrelated directions. “Put your milk on the table and get your coat on.”
- Likes to talk and carries on elaborate conversations.
- Likes to shock others by using “forbidden” words.
- Loves to tell jokes that may not make any sense to adults.

Nurture your child’s language skills

- Visit the public library regularly.
- Play games that encourage counting and color naming.
- Encourage children to tell you stories.
- Help children create their own story books with magazine pictures or postcards.
- Read books with poems and songs.
- Take turns telling jokes.
- Record your child telling a story or singing a song.

Age
5 to 6 years

Typical language skills

- Speaks with correct grammar and word form.
- Expresses self in pretend play.
- Writes first name, some letters, and numbers.
- Reads simple words.

Nurture your child’s language skills

- Read books with your child every day.
- Encourage pretend play. Help children create props from old sheets, cardboard boxes, and household items. Show children how to label their creations with simple signs like “Shoe Store” or “Tickets.”
- Encourage children to put on simple plays and shows.
- Let children help you sort coupons and cut ads out of the newspaper.
- Ask your child to help you locate and find grocery items in the grocery store.
- Check how many store signs your child can identify when you are out running errands.

Try fingerplays and songs

Can’t carry a tune? Don’t have a piano? That’s not a problem with young children. Kids love to sing! You may not realize it but you probably know quite a few songs from your own childhood. Some familiar songs you might know are:

- Hokey Pokey
- Farmer in the Dell
- [Here We Go ‘Round the] Mulberry Bush
- Hush Little Baby
- Eensy, Weensy Spider
- If You’re Happy and You Know It
- Old MacDonald Had a Farm

Children also delight in finger-plays like “This little piggy” and “Eensy, weensy

spider." You also might like to try the following:

Old Owl
An owl sat alone on the branch of a tree
(use arm as a branch, raise thumb for owl)
She was quiet as quiet as quiet could be
T'was night and her eyes were wide open like this
(circle eyes with fingers and look around)
She looked all around; not a thing did she miss.
Some little birds perched on the branch of the tree,
(fingers of other hand fly on tree)
And sat there as quiet as quiet could be
The solemn old owl said, "Whoo-whooo-whooo,"
(wave hand away, fluttering fingers behind back)
And jumped at the birds and away they flew.

If you would like to learn more songs and finger-plays, check with your local library for children's records and audio-cassette tapes.

Read more about it!

For more information about children and families, ask for the following publications from your county extension office:
Understanding Children—Kindergarten Ahead, PM 1529n
Understanding Children—Learning to read and write, PM 1529e
Child's Play—Fingerplays Plus, PM 1770b (cost)
So Alive—Three to Five, PM 1431a–f (cost)

Books for Children

The Listening Walk, Paul Showers
The Snowman, Raymond Briggs
Baby's Favorite Things, Marsha Cohen
My First Look at Colors, Stephen Oliver
Gobble, Growl, Grunt, Peter Spier
Push-Pull, Empty-Full, Tana Hoban
Are You My Mother?, P. Eastman
Rosie's Walk, Pat Hutchins
Caps for Sale, Esphyr Slobodkina

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Written by Lesia Oesterreich, extension family life specialist. File: Family life 8

Appendix B

Age Range for Questions

Children understand and can answer:

'WH--' Question	Developmental Age Range
What ("What's that?")	12 - 18 months
Where	24 - 30 months
When	30 - 36 months
Who	36 - 48 months
Why, How, What will happen if...?	36 - 48 months

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Appendix C

Specific Suggestions for a Trip to the Zoo

Written by
Wendy Robinson

Many opportunities arise for using the three strategies (making comments or statements, asking questions, and expanding or adding new information to children's questions) before, during, and after language experiences. The following suggestions are described in depth to facilitate the adult in helping children expand language understanding and gain background knowledge.

Planning BEFORE, DURING, and AFTER activities for a trip to the zoo

BEFORE the zoo trip. One activity, which can be used with a group of children before a routine event or planned experience, is to make a chart. When using a planned experience like a trip to the zoo, a parent or teacher could make a chart *before* the trip, listing information children already know about zoos. The parent or teacher could talk about zoos and ask questions such as:

- "How many zoo animals can you name?"
- "What is your favorite zoo animal?"
- "What do you know about zoos?"

The adult would write down ideas children shared and hang the chart up so all children could look at it before going to the zoo.

Alternate: Before the zoo trip. *Before* the trip, place materials relating to a routine or a planned experience in centers of the room for exploration. Put zoo animal materials, such as zoo puzzles, zoo stamps, and/or plastic zoo animals, in different centers in the room. On a table, place picture cards of zoo animals with the name of the animal printed on the card. However, just putting materials in centers or on tables is not enough. Adults need to facilitate learning by engaging children in the activities and materials by having a conversation, making comments, and using the four strategies mentioned before (talking with children, asking them questions, expanding on their answers to questions or comments, and providing them with new ideas or information). You can use this 'exploration center' idea with any daily routine experience. For example, a center could be set up for brushing teeth by providing dolls, toothpaste, toothbrushes, water, and towels.

DURING the zoo trip. *While at the zoo,* the children could be provided a picture map of animals to find at the zoo. As the animals are found, the adult chaperone

could let different children check off or circle animals seen at the zoo. On the map, the adult could also write comments that children made while watching the animals at the zoo.

AFTER the zoo trip. *After* the zoo trip, children will have many ideas to relate about this planned experience. Look again at the chart children helped make. Have the children name new animals that had not been on the chart or new information they learned at the zoo. Discuss previous ideas children shared and compare new or different ideas children found on their trip. You can use this same activity with a daily routine experience such as making popcorn or going outside to play.

Alternate: AFTER the zoo trip. *After* it has been completed, describe the routine or planned experience from beginning to end. As a group, let the children describe the planned activity (zoo trip) or routine activity (making popcorn) from the beginning to the end. At the three- to five-year age, children usually remember what they did at the beginning and the end of an activity but have trouble remembering the middle. Adults can help children with reminders such as, "After the monkeys, we saw animals that were black and swim in really cold water. What were they?" If children are having difficulty, provide two choices to get missing information, for example: "Were those animals called seals or zebras?"

Alternate: AFTER the zoo trip. Allow each child to tell a favorite part of a routine or planned experience. The experience now becomes personal to each child, helping him/her gain better understanding and remember the experience.

BEFORE or AFTER activity suggestions

- Read new or reread favorite books relating to an activity. The same book may be read to children many times since it reinforces words and sentences within the child's language repertoire.

- In a writing center, place objects relating to the activity, printed word cards, and empty pages stapled to make little books for children to write or draw pictures of their experiences.

Through these kinds of activities (making and discussing charts, describing and sequencing experiences, reading books relating to activities, and exploration centers and materials with adult interaction), children gain background knowledge to make meaning from experiences. It is important to remember these activities and conversations can be used with children in large groups, small groups, or individually in a child's home or early childhood setting. The most critical idea is that there must be conversation and interaction between the adult and the child or children, not just the adult talking and the children listening.

Appendix D

Suggestions to Enhance Language Development

Provide good models of language

Children between the ages of three and five go through a huge language growth period. They need to hear models of good language at their level. If a child hears correct language modeled several times, s/he will begin to imitate it. Asking a child "Is wu a widdle tired?" instead of asking "Are you a little tired?" does not provide a good language model for the child to hear or imitate.

Encourage children to play with language

Children need to *play or experiment* with language. Adults quickly become aware of children who have learned a new word or phrase such as "Why" or "I don't have to." The child may use his/her new word or phrase again and again playing with language – sometimes appropriately and sometimes not. Children must learn when and how to use words, phrases, or sentences they have heard adults use. They don't always use the words correctly the first time. As adults, it is important to encourage children to express themselves freely and respond so they see communication as a positive experience. However, adults also need to provide children with alternative responses if words are NOT used appropriately.

Allow children to learn from their mistakes

Making mistakes is a necessary part of learning the way language works. The best way for children to learn to correct mistakes is to have an adult model the correct words. It is not necessary to have the child repeat the correct words each time the adult models it – just have him/her listen. For example:

> Child: "Her hit me."
> Adult: "Oh, *she* hit you. Let's go talk to Lizzie."

Children also make mistakes in single words. Again, the adult should provide a correct model. For example:

> Child: "Sagetti is my favorite food."
> Adult: "I like ***spa****ghetti* too, especially with lots of ***spa****ghetti* sauce."

It is important adults understand that making mistakes is a natural part of learning and using language. Over time, with adult modeling in conversation and through listening to the language in books, children start to use language that sounds more and more like an adult.

Begin conversations with children

Adults frequently begin a conversation with another adult by commenting or talking about what is happening around them. This same strategy works well with children. A simple comment can work like magic to start a conversation. For example, the adult might say, "Wow, the sun melted the snow into water." This comment lets the child know the adult is interested in a familiar topic, and the child will want to comment, too. You can always find new and interesting things to start a conversation in an easy, gentle way.

Ask questions

Adults ask questions to keep a conversation going with other adults. The same strategy works with a child. Just make certain questions are appropriate for the understanding level of the child you are addressing. Ask a question that a child understands and wants to answer. Then wait for an answer. When asking questions to keep the conversation going, encourage children to think; it will indicate your interest. *Be sure to give the child time to answer. Little ones sometimes process questions very slowly.*

Repeat, rephrase, and expand children's talk

This is another technique that can be used to assist children in moving from words, to phrases, to sentences, and to conversation. For example:

Child: "That's a cat."
Adult: "Yes, that is a cat." (Repeat)
"You see the cat." (Rephrase)
"It is a Siamese cat." (Expansion)

When adults imitate (repeat the child's comment) and add words (expansion), the child's existing knowledge is increased, new information is provided, and the child is given another word to use when s/he is ready.

Let the child talk

Young children need to express themselves out loud. They must practice talking. Adults usually don't need this practice! After you ask a question, listen with interest to the response the child gives. One phrase used by adults that should become a part of daily routines with children is, "Tell me about it." The more chances children have to express themselves, the more they learn. Adults often dominate the conversation. As parents and teachers, we are not always aware of the dominant role we carry as we talk to preschoolers. We must be careful we give young children a chance to learn their own ways of expressing themselves.

How do you remember to give a child time to talk? Focus on what the child is saying (this is called listening) and when the child pauses, don't start talking. Count to five and wait for the child to continue.

As children go from the infant to toddler to preschool years, they learn to talk in conversation, taking turns with another person. A child begins to learn turn-taking sometime between birth and six months of age. (Example: The child babbles, adult imitates, and the child babbles again.) Turn-taking with preschoolers is a bit different. Sometimes the adult is in charge of the conversation and sometimes the child is in charge. You can see the back-and-forth turn-taking which occurs with a preschooler in the next two conversation examples.

Example of adult in charge:

Adult says, "I'm going to make toast for us this morning. Can you tell me what I will do first?"
Child responds, "Get the bread."
Adult asks, "I really like my toast with something besides butter. What could I put on my toast that is sticky and tastes sweet?"

Example of child in charge:

Child says, "I want toast for a snack."
Adult says, "Oh, that sounds really good. Are you having plain toast or jelly toast?"
Child says, "I'm going to put jelly on it."

If the child forgets a word or forgets to take his or her turn, the other person can help out. For example, this child tells Grandma about making 'ants on a log' for snack time.

Grandma asks, "You ate ants for a snack?"
Child says, "No, we put peanut butter an raisins on, uhm, that green stick stuff."
Grandma says, "Oh, you mean celery. You had a healthy snack. You really didn't eat ants!"

Let the child carry more responsibility in talking

As children approach school age, it is very important that they start to carry more of the responsibility of the talking. They should depend less on the other person, especially when describing something that happened to them or something they have done. Children need to be able to talk about things that happened yesterday or things that are going to happen tomorrow. Children also begin to put several sentences together to talk about the same topic. For example: "I got a new dolly. She has a pretty dress and party shoes. My mom got it for me." Putting several sentences together to talk about the same topic builds a foundation for later writing

skills. If children cannot talk out loud for a short period of time on one topic and have it make sense, they will not be able to think those things and write them down on paper. Research indicates that preschool children who can tell us personal events (little stories) that happened to them have an easier time understanding stories that are read to them and stories they later read to themselves (Morrow, 1990). The only way children gain these verbal expression skills is to practice them. Remember the three points adults use to assist children in language expression:

1. Initiate a conversation with the child by making comments or statements.
2. Ask the child questions using 'yes/no,' 'wh--' or 'open-ended' questions.
3. Give the child opportunities to talk and expand or add new information.

Make time for children to practice talking

As a parent or teacher you can use a variety of activities to provide time for children to practice talking. Activities that give children the opportunity to practice verbal expression skills include:

- Allowing time for show and tell (sharing)
- Making a statement or comment about a picture the child just drew
- Asking about something fun s/he did at home
- Prompting them to retell favorite stories

Make a Personal Experiences Center

In the house, preschool classroom, or early childhood setting, make a place where young children can talk with parents or teachers about events occurring in their daily lives. The adult listens, prompts discussion, and writes down the important items on paper. To get children started, tell them your personal stories. Talk about things that interest you. You might also have a child's peer be the 'teacher' and listen to different children's stories.

Talk aloud about the things you are doing

As we have learned, the best way to talk with children is to focus on daily routines that children are involved in and understand. As you go about daily routines, talk about things you are doing.

For example, as you make a snack or a meal say, "I am stirring the soup. I am taking bread out of the wrapper. I am putting the knife in the peanut butter jar. I am spreading peanut butter on the bread." This kind of talk helps young children develop the skills to tell other people about things that happen to them in their everyday experiences.

Use TV as an interaction or opportunity to talk

Television is a part of everyone's daily lives. However, there is no active participation with the child watching television unless the adult engages the child in language interaction activities. To make the most of TV watching, adults must watch some shows with the child(ren). Adults should ask questions, have the child(ren) tell about their favorite parts of the show, and encourage the child(ren) to ask questions and make comments about the shows. The adult has now turned a passive activity (watching television) into an interactive activity and added meaning to it. An interaction easily takes place by sharing knowledge and information gleaned from the television show.

Read stories to children

Reading stories to children allows them to hear a variety of words and sentences in a variety of meaningful contexts. Reading to children helps build language expression skills as children move from single words, to phrases, to sentences, and into conversation. As stories are read, ask children questions to gather important pieces of information. Questions do not need to be complex. Ask familiar questions such as:

- Who is the story about?
- What was [name of character]'s problem in the story?
- Where did the story take place?
- What happened at the end of the story?

Asking and answering these questions during and after the story helps children know the parts of the story that are important. Those children who have difficulty using phrases and sentences to retell stories may need more help from the parent or teacher. Story-reading is just one of the many activities that can be used to develop language into sentences and conversation.

Remember to integrate the three major principles of language skill development into your daily routine

1. Children need to have many interactive experiences to develop background knowledge and language skills;
2. Children need frequent opportunities to talk about their experiences and ideas using words, phrases, and sentences; and,
3. Children need to learn and use new vocabulary or words continuously.

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